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SECURITY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF MANUSCRIPT
HOLDINGS AT SOUTHERN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Katherine F. Martin

Part II:
Security Procedures and the Patron*

Protecting the manuscript collection against misuse by those whom its organization and administration are designed to serve demands the abandonment of reliance on public trustworthiness and the adoption of a body of coordinated security procedures. Foremost among these must be the habit of surveillance. It is this observation of the patron, and the accompanying regulation of his access to and handling of manuscript materials, that receives the most attention when discussion in the literature turns to the defense of a repository's holdings. The chief difficulty in applying any of the recommendations which relate to reader service lies, of course, in the concurrent striving to achieve that balanced state of affairs that provides for security without imposing undue or unwarranted restrictions on the patron.

Observation of patron behavior in the reading room is perhaps the central element in insuring the security of manuscripts in use. This practice can be carried out, although with varying degrees of effectiveness, in several different ways. Uniformly recommended is the

*Part I of Ms. Martin's study of security practices at southern academic libraries, "Administration, Staffing, and Physical Security," appeared in the spring 1980 issue of Georgia Archive.

continuous posting of a trained staff member in the search room. As English archivist Hilary Jenkinson has noted, supervision should always include the presence of an official whenever manuscripts are in use, if only as a technical guarantee.¹ It is the presence of such a staff member, or alternatively of a guard, which contributes the most to the impression of a concern for security and the intention to successfully maintain it.² Yet of the eighty-six repositories surveyed only six (6.9%) regularly station a staff member charged solely with the observation of patrons in the reading room; another three (3.4%) alternate between this policy and delegation of certain responsibilities to this individual which require him to divide his attention or leave his post.

The most popular method of surveillance among those surveyed was stationing an attendant in the search room while assigning other distracting duties to him. As thirty-one of the respondents were dependent on one full-time professional assisted by at most one nonprofessional for care of their manuscript holdings, it is not surprising that these and sixteen other repositories, some having only part-time staff, found it necessary to demand such a division of tasks. In thirty-two cases (37.2%) this practice went uncompleted by any other means of surveillance. Twenty-six libraries (30.2%) depended on indirect observation of patrons by staff in an adjacent area; ten (11.6%) combined this with another form of surveillance, while sixteen (18.6%) did not. Four special collections also utilized some form of video monitoring. Of the remaining eighteen repositories (two not providing information on this topic), fourteen (16.2%) employed no surveillance procedures. In judging this apparent weakness in security practices, however, one might bear in mind not only the possibility of financial constraints but also the idea advanced by Alfreda Scobey, an attorney who has made a special study of the theft of archival and library materials, that "what is required in the way of surveillance depends less on the class of

people using the facilities than on the value of the holdings."³

Of the fifty-four respondents relying on attendants in the reading area to provide surveillance of manuscripts in use, forty-two (77.7%) maintain a staff member on duty at all times, and another four (7.4%) report that they usually do so. Thus, those who depend on staff in the search room to provide security are regular in their use of this method. The effect of this faithfulness is, however, reduced in some cases by the physical arrangement of the reading room. Of the seventy collections relying on staff monitoring in some form, eleven (15.7%) are handicapped by a physical layout which prevents simultaneous observation of all patrons. This must be recognized as a particularly serious situation for these repositories, and others with the same problem, because of the generally static quality of facilities and the expense, inconvenience, and bureaucratic entanglement involved in instituting any satisfactory changes in existing quarters.

The effectiveness of surveillance can be increased in one way by the exercise of some control over those permitted access to the collection. A registration procedure which includes provision of personal identification and references and an interview with a staff member has become a common precaution. The idea of screening that such a practice evokes has, however, met with disfavor in some circles, particularly as it suggests preferential treatment for those affiliated with the host institution or guaranteed special privileges under terms of an agreement with a donor.⁴ Manuscripts curator Robert L. Brubaker found in his 1964 survey of seventy-seven major manuscript collections that many libraries continue to prefer that their manuscripts be used only for serious research purposes, and hence are often reluctant to grant access to genealogists and undergraduates.⁵

As long as equal access prevails, however, it has continued to be acceptable to examine applicants'

motives and abilities and to exclude those who have "demonstrated such carelessness or deliberate destructiveness as to endanger the safety of the material."⁶ Indeed, as archivist Theodore R. Schellenberg has observed, it is the duty of the repository to make "materials available only to the fullest extent consistent with a reasonable regard for their preservation, weighing the demands of present-day inquirers for their use against the demands of posterity for their preservation."⁷

Among the libraries surveyed, the interview is the most commonly employed screening device. As librarian Robert Rosenthal has noted, however, the procedure is of benefit to the patron as well as to the security-conscious staff. The interview not only constitutes the simplest way for a prospective user to present his credentials and explain his intentions, and in turn be informed of the regulations of the repository, but also can be used to make the reader aware of guides, services, and even manuscript materials unknown to him, and of others who are investigating the same or related topics.⁸ Interviews are required at least some of the time by sixty-four (74.4%) of the institutions surveyed; twenty-five of the fifty-four (46.2%) employing nonprofessionals permit these staff members to conduct examination and orientation sessions.

Forty-seven (54.6%) repositories demand some form of formal identification of those applying to use manuscript materials; in most cases, an item bearing a photograph of the bearer, such as a driver's license or student identification, is specified. While over half the repositories surveyed require interviews and presentation of materials of identification, only fourteen (16.2%) demand references of researchers. Of these, eleven use this requirement as more than a means of suggesting security consciousness; at these libraries patrons' references are frequently checked, particularly when application is made to use certain collections.

The determination that an individual's "preparation and purpose"⁹ are acceptable is, of course, only a part of insuring satisfactory behavior in the search room. Surveillance plays a large role in attaining this end. Perhaps equally important is the distribution of rules and regulations detailing restrictions and orienting patrons to the use of manuscript materials; in many instances, a prospective reader is required to sign a statement attesting to his examination and acceptance of such conditions. Further reinforcement in the form of posted signs summarizing such regulations and detailing the penalties for theft or mutilation of materials is also recommended.¹⁰

The value of such patron instruction is widely recognized by those in the survey group; fifty-one (59.3%) distribute to their researchers a list of rules and regulations governing use of their manuscript holdings. Of these, thirty-eight (44.1%) also require a signed agreement to the same. It is the prevailing and widely advocated practice that such use contracts also include substantial personal information about the applicant, including his name, local and permanent addresses, educational background, institutional affiliation, research interests, purpose, and publication plans.¹¹ Some institutions also require prospective readers to specify whether they intend only to examine materials, copy text or take notes, publish utilizing information so obtained, or publish the text of materials examined.

The most commonly suggested restrictions on use include checking of personal belongings with significant limitation of what may be carried into the search room and banning smoking, food, and ink. Thirty-two (37.2%) of those participating in this study indicated that they regularly store patrons' possessions outside of the reading room; another two libraries make such decisions on a case-by-case basis. Seventeen of the thirty-two repositories (53.1%) which limit what patrons may take into the search room permit only writing materials; thirteen specify that only paper and

pencil may be carried in, while three allow only "writing items." Four other libraries also permit researchers to retain their notes or mechanical aids.

Sixty-four of the responding repositories (74.4%) prohibit all smoking in their quarters; almost all of those which do permit the practice do not allow concurrent use of manuscripts. No respondent indicated that food is allowed in the collection. Thirty-seven repositories (43.0%) permit researchers to use ink, while one library reported that its policy on this matter varies. Typewriters are permitted by fifty libraries (58.1%); of the thirty which reported their prohibition, some noted the lack of suitable quarters for their use. Many collections also impose one additional regulation. Twenty-six (30.2%) of those surveyed indicated that patrons are assigned a place in the reading room, a procedure permitting staff to seat those using particularly rare or valuable materials, or those whose motives are suspect, in a highly visible location.

The maintenance of use records also contributes to protecting materials in patrons' hands. Twenty-nine (33.7%) of those surveyed produce access logs in some form. Fifty institutions (58.1%) require the patron to complete signed and dated charge slips before providing requested materials. These, if retained, constitute a virtually irrefutable record of an individual's use of materials at a given time, invaluable in determining possible culpability in the case of missing manuscripts.

One means of augmenting this procedure is the use of a daily register, where similar records are maintained under the name of the reader rather than the manuscript group. The lesser effectiveness of this generally more informal record is reflected in its less frequent use by those participating in this study. Of eighty-three repositories responding on this subject, forty-two (50.6%) use a daily register.

Staff supervision of photoduplication, and the maintenance of thorough records of this service, is another precaution which serves the same purpose as the charge slip and the daily register. Robert L. Brubaker's 1964 study of major manuscript repositories in this country found an increasing liberalism in photoduplication policies;¹² this trend is mirrored in the practices of those contacted in this study. Seventy-seven (92.7%) of the eighty-three institutions which provided information on duplicating procedures permit replication in some form. Of these seventy-seven, however, all but twelve (15.5%) allow researchers to do their own copying; two others require staff to do the duplicating in some cases.

Less information is available on the number which maintain records of these services. Of the fifty-four respondents to this query, twenty-six (48.1%) report keeping such statistics, either in the form of a log or through notations made on the patron's charge slips or registration form. Another three libraries keep notes on payments received or the number of items duplicated. Thus, only some 37 percent of those providing duplicating services can be definitely identified as producing records of their use.

Regulation of the number of manuscripts provided to the reader and of his access to unprocessed materials has also proven helpful in controlling theft and mutilation. Both those who have conducted studies of archival security and those who have had first-hand experience with manuscript theft recommend limiting the amount of manuscripts brought to a researcher at any one time. One box or a single volume is the ideal maximum suggested, although the role of staff constraints in implementing this policy is recognized.¹³ Seventy-two of the eighty-two institutions (87.8%) reporting their practice in this area impose some limitations, a number indicative of the broad recognition of the value of this elementary and easily introduced procedure. Some of the smallest and most lightly utilized repositories are quite strict about this practice.

On limiting access to unprocessed materials, however, those surveyed score somewhat lower marks. Of the seventy-nine which described their policies, forty-seven (59.4%) permit patrons use of these items. In most instances, where the bulk of the repository's collections has been processed, this is not a uniform practice; that is, it varies not only with the condition and organizational structure of a given manuscript group and with staff knowledge and availability to assist a scholar in its use, but also with such factors as the nature of the patron's need for access and the extent of the contemplated examination.

Perhaps the most effective means of limiting theft and damage is the inspection of materials when returned to the staff by the reader and the scrutiny of the researcher's belongings on his departure. Checking individual manuscripts in and out is, as the American Historical Association's Ad Hoc Committee noted in its 1951 report, both costly in time and a nuisance to the reader.¹⁴ Yet even as a cursory or random procedure, it can serve as a deterrent to the unscrupulous and the disturbed, and it can certainly be uniformly applied to particularly valuable items. In spite of the costliness of the practice in dollars and staff labor, sixty-six libraries (76.7%) report that they examine manuscripts to some degree, though frequently only upon their return. There is great variation in this practice, including an actual count of all items as returned, random checks of materials against inventory, and thorough inspection of certain marked folders with contents judged susceptible to theft.

While three-fourths of those surveyed thus make some attempt to control unauthorized removal of materials from the collection, only twenty-nine (33.7%) make any inspection of a researcher's personal possessions on departure. Perhaps those who examine their manuscripts feel that patron inspection represents an unnecessary duplication of effort. In many instances, however, such apparent neglect probably stems both from a reluctance to submit the innocent majority to such a

procedure and from the demands the practice, when combined with manuscript checking as well as other security procedures, makes on the staff.

Such security measures as surveillance, requiring of signed agreements to collection regulations, restrictions on possessions in the search room, use of charge slips, and examination of materials following use little profit the manuscripts repository if it permits special privileges to certain patrons. Such opportunities are extended to some researchers by thirty-nine (45.3%) of those surveyed; these include unsupervised use of manuscripts in closed studies, admittance to storage areas, issue of an extraordinary amount of manuscripts, after-hours access, and charge-out rights. Of these privileges, those that involve relaxation of surveillance during hours of operation are most commonly extended.

Some twenty libraries provide closed studies, seventeen allow some researchers bulk use of manuscripts, and fifteen permit certain patrons stack access. In addition, eleven allow after-hours entry and seven make provision for the circulation of manuscript materials. Three employ flexible systems, keying what is permitted to the special needs of the privileged patron. Multiple concessions are made by nineteen (48.7%) of the thirty-nine which make such arrangements. The most common pairing is permitting unsupervised use of manuscripts in closed studies and stack access.

Those surveyed are, however, somewhat more reluctant to permit the removal of manuscripts under their administration to other areas of the building or from the premises altogether. Carrying manuscripts from departmental jurisdiction is allowed by thirty-four repositories (39.5%). Twenty-one (24.4%) permit certain individuals, notably staff, faculty and school administrators, to take materials from the building. This latter practice is a direct violation of the Association of College and Research Libraries' Committee on

Manuscripts Collections recommendation, approved as ACRL policy in January 1974.¹⁵ It is disturbing that this number of repositories continue to entrust the supervision of such valuable materials to staff members untrained in their administration and frequently overburdened with the demands of their own departments, and alternately to the hands of those who will expose them to the risk of damage, if unintentional, in the outside world.

This lack of security consciousness in one important realm is not, however, indicative of a general absence of appreciation for the need for protective measures. Wide variation in practice and in the strength of the overall security program is evident among the repositories surveyed. Many of these institutions continue to be plagued by problems which are shared by others similarly concerned with the preservation of valuable materials. In fact, all but the most well-funded and staffed manuscript departments and special collections continue to suffer some weaknesses in their security programs. Yet many of the repositories participating in this study recognize these weaknesses and, as far as financial and administrative constraints permit, are implementing necessary improvements and modifications of existing procedures.

The analysis, on the part of those surveyed, of areas of continued weakness in their security procedures reflects the needs revealed in their reports of current practice. Only one of the eighty-six repositories participating in this project had at that time made any use of the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) security consultant service. Many others, however, by their expression of concern for their inadequacies, have demonstrated their awareness of the need for improvement. Only nine appear to have been motivated by theft during the last five years, and only six have employed the SAA's national registry of lost and stolen materials. Yet there is widespread evidence of an appreciation for the tenet that the first factor in security is prevention. At the same time, the

commitment to the service of scholarship remains strong, and balance, rather than the sacrifice of one end in the attainment of the other, is generally sought.

Foremost among those areas described as being in the greatest need of change was the number of staff members. This emphasis echoed the findings of library analyst Maurice F. Tauber, who has described organization and administration as one of the usual trouble spots in a library.¹⁶ Thirteen repositories (15.1%) suggested that their surveillance operations and the maintenance of adequate descriptions of their holdings have been severely handicapped by an insufficiency of personnel. In contrast, two others claimed the opposite problem, citing too many staff members as a security threat. Staff attitude, particularly as it affects the quality of surveillance, was cited as a problem area by another two repositories, while one reported the need for improved training of departmental personnel.

Inadequate surveillance procedures, a problem area closely connected to insufficient staff, are a cause for concern at ten libraries. That these two should be most frequently cited in this self-analysis of security weaknesses is not surprising. Thirty-one (36%) of the eighty-six departments function with only one full-time professional staff member, assisted by at most one full-time nonprofessional. And eighteen (20.9%) have only one full-time staff member. With the range of demands thus made on a limited number of personnel, the quality of surveillance together with that of other security procedures naturally suffers.

Other practices negatively affected by lack of staff are examination of manuscripts following their use and inspection of patrons' personal possessions prior to their departure. Sixty-six (76.7%) institutions report some scrutiny of manuscripts following use; for the most part, however, this is not the thorough examination that its effectiveness as a

security measure demands. Twenty-nine (33.7%) repositories inspect patrons' belongings for concealed materials. Thirty-two (37.2%) require the storage of some possessions outside the search room. Yet this is not widely recognized as an area in need of improvement, as only two (2.3%) repositories cite the development of more satisfactory storage for patrons' belongings as a security goal.

After problems related to staffing inadequacies, the physical arrangement of facilities is most frequently regarded as a pressing security matter. Seven (8.1%) respondents note that the separation of reading rooms from staff workrooms or storage areas, or alternately the barriers to surveillance presented by the collection layout, is a cause for concern. Three also report their need for improvement of storage arrangements, presently not sufficiently intruder-proof.

Physical protection as provided by fire and intruder detection is another focus for concern. For the most part, the seven libraries which express dissatisfaction with the fire-fighting systems in effect are anxious for their improvement rather than remedying any lack of basic protection. Such a goal is recognized as likely to be unattainable, however, since the modifications desired are expensive and often at variance with established library practices.

The provision of access control in the form of intruder alarms is a related area which also elicited various expressions of concern. Five repositories (5.8%) saw the absence of such alarms as a security problem, while three others (3.4%) reported a general uneasiness over the quality of their intruder protection. Other practices for regulating access to the collection also generated comment. Four respondents noted their apprehension about after-hours and hence unsupervised admission of maintenance and housekeeping personnel; they represent, however, only a small minority of the thirty-four (39.5%) which permit such entry. Two collections felt that their lock and key control

was inadequate, while two others voiced a general concern over regulation of entry to the department.

Collection control as it is provided through written records was the final area which was cited as a continuing security problem by those surveyed. Four repositories (4.6%) regarded their finding aids as inadequate for identifying holdings; another found similar fault with the state of its inventory, labeling this as the collection's most pressing security problem. Such concern for the quality of these tools mirrored the general findings of this study that fifty of the eighty-six respondents (58.1%) believe such resources are of value in identifying only some, if any, fugitive materials. Four institutions also identified record keeping as related to reader services as a problem area. Two expressed a need to produce photocopies to substitute for valuable items, a deficiency shared by twenty-nine (33.7%) of the repositories. The need to develop a registration and manuscripts use form was noted by two respondents.

For the most part, however, physical control of manuscript collections is well established among the survey group, although weaknesses remain in the areas of after-hours access regulations, keeping of vault use records, and stamping of manuscripts. It is with preservation as it relates to patron use of materials that these repositories sometimes fail to maintain adequate security. A narrow majority do interview prospective readers and require photographic identification of applicants, distribute a list of reading room rules and regulations to patrons, limit the amount of material presented for use at one time, prohibit use of ink while handling manuscripts, and require the completion of charge slips when requesting materials.

Yet only 37 percent of those surveyed impose any restrictions on patrons' possessions in the search room, and only some 33 percent examine these belongings on departure. Some 45 percent extend to readers a variety of scholar's privileges, and 59 percent permit

access to unprocessed materials. Nearly 85 percent of those which allow photocopying let the reader perform this procedure, and only 48 percent maintain any written record of the practice. Some 39 percent of the repositories participating in this study permit the use of materials in other areas of the building, and nearly one-fourth allow their removal from the premises. Those surveyed are also grossly underprotected by insurance, with only eight (9.3%) holding "valued item" policies that attempt to reflect current market values. And only seven (8.1%) report any bonding of employees.

There are thus still many changes to be made before manuscript materials housed in academic libraries can be said to be secure from both human malfeasance and the elements. The concern for improvement voiced both in the literature and in the self-analysis of those participating in this study does interject a brighter note into the often gloomy statistics. Five libraries indicated that new buildings were being developed; in each instance, respondents reported that the recognition of security needs contributed substantially to the planning of special collection facilities.

In the end, it must be remembered that those who administer manuscript collections are striving not only to protect the materials entrusted to their care but also to extend the maximum public service possible without jeopardizing such preservation efforts. And, as noted archivist James B. Rhoads has remarked, even in the context of recommending procedures to thwart theft, there is no foolproof combination of deterrents in any situation.¹⁷ Certainly individual variations in size and value of holdings, and in volume of use, make differences in security procedures both understandable and acceptable. What archivists and curators can and should strive for is the minimal standard of patron screening, surveillance, and record keeping that permits the administrator to control and preserve his holdings.

NOTES

¹Hilary Jenkinson, A Manual of Archive Administration, intro. and bibliog. by Roger H. Ellis, reissue of 2d revised ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co. LTD, 1965), p. 64.

²James B. Rhoads, "Alienation and Thievery: Archival Problems," American Archivist 29, no. 2 (April 1966): 204; John M. Kinney, "Archival Security and Insecurity," American Archivist 38, no. 4 (October 1975): 497.

³Alfreda Scobey, "On Booknapping and Other Headaches," Georgia Archive 4, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 22.

⁴Robert L. Clark, Jr., ed., Archive-Library Relations (New York and London: R. R. Bowker Co., 1976), p. 92.

⁵Robert L. Brubaker, "Manuscript Collections," Library Trends 13, no. 2 (October 1964): 244-45.

⁶"Statement on Access to Original Research Materials in Libraries, Archives, and Manuscript Repositories," College and Research Libraries News 35, no. 5 (May 1974): 114.

⁷Theodore R. Schellenberg, Modern Archives; Principles and Techniques (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 231.

⁸Robert Rosenthal, "The User and the Used," Drexel Library Quarterly 11, no. 1 (January 1975): 101.

⁹Howard H. Peckham, "Policies Regarding the Use of Manuscripts," Library Trends 5, no. 3 (January 1957): 363.

¹⁰Edmund Berkeley, Jr., "Archival Security. A Personal and Circumstantial View," Georgia Archive 4,

no. 1 (Winter 1976): 15; Timothy Walch, "The Impact of Library Security," College and Research Libraries 38, no. 2 (March 1977): 102; Robert H. Land, "Defense of Archives Against Human Foes," American Archivist 19, no. 2 (April 1956): 130.

¹¹See, for example, Ruth B. Bordin and Robert M. Warner, The Modern Manuscript Library (New York and London: Scarecrow Press, 1966), pp. 141-45; "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Manuscripts Set Up by the American Historical Association in December 1948," American Archivist 14, no. 3 (July 1951): 237; College and University Archives Committee, Society of American Archivists, Forms Manual (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1973), Section VII. Reference and Researcher Requests.

¹²Brubaker, "Manuscript Collections," p. 247.

¹³Rhoads, "Alienation and Thievery," p. 204; Berkeley, "Archival Security," p. 12; Kinney, "Archival Security and Insecurity," p. 496.

¹⁴"Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Manuscripts," p. 234.

¹⁵"Statement on Access to Original Research Materials," p. 114.

¹⁶Maurice F. Tauber, "Surveys by Librarians," College and Research Libraries 15, no. 2 (April 1954): 192.

¹⁷Rhoads, "Alienation and Thievery," p. 202.